

FBI launches review of McVeigh evidence

- New documents could show he had many accomplices

By JOHN SOLOMON
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WASHINGTON (AP) — The FBI agents given the unexpected job of reanalyzing evidence nine years after the original Oklahoma City bombing investigation have plenty of places to look.

Their mission is clearly stated in orders given Friday: determine if the years-old whispers that Timothy McVeigh had more accomplices can be corroborated or disproved from a small body of documents that apparently never reached the original Oklahoma City investigation.

The outcome may not be as clear.

A trail of hotel and car sale receipts, surveillance videos and interviews with convicted felons awaits the agents, offering them tantalizing but at times contradictory clues.

The starting point will be hundreds of miles away from the devastation of McVeigh's deadly 1995 bomb — in FBI files originally gathered in Philadelphia, Cleveland, and Omaha, Neb., where agents helped solve one of the most famous banking robbery sprees of the 1990s.

The Associated Press reported last week that agents in that white supremacist bank robbery case collected witness statements, blasting caps and even a driver's license that raised questions of whether the Aryan Republican Army bank robbery gang might have assisted McVeigh's plot. But they did not share all the information with their colleagues in Oklahoma City.

In a few instances, agents even allowed some evidence to be destroyed.

The disclosures shook the FBI veteran who oversaw the massive Oklahoma City investigation. For years, Dan Defenbaugh had insisted every legiti-

mate lead was pursued.

But Defenbaugh says he did not know about some of the evidence unearthed by the AP in the robbery case and he no longer could say for sure his investigation saw everything it needed.

The FBI responded Friday by asking its inspection division to review some of that evidence and determine if more needs to be done. The inspection division is a unit of senior agents that routinely reviews the work of the bureau.

The initial FBI review will be narrow, officials say. It will be limited to a review of documents from the bank robbery investigation that both included references to Oklahoma City and were not shared with the original investigation.

Those most familiar with the case predict the new review will run into a handful of old questions.

For instance, the FBI was unable to determine McVeigh's whereabouts or activities on some dates in the Oklahoma bombing chronology.

Agents in the bank robbery case documented several instances through interviews and hotel receipts in which the bank robbers were in the same general vicinity as McVeigh when some of those gaps occur.

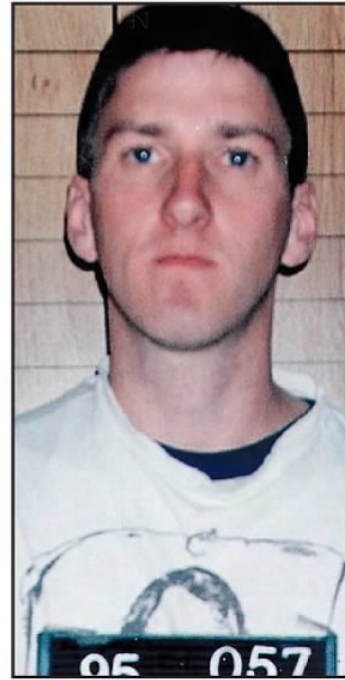
Also, there is the unanswered question of who robbed Arkansas gun dealer Roger Moore, a crime that the government argued raised the money for McVeigh's bomb. Moore said the men who robbed him did not resemble Nichols or McVeigh.

The bank robbery investigation turned up a tantalizing clue. The robbers had in their possession an Arkansas driver's license in the name of Robert Miller, the alias used by Moore in his dealings with McVeigh.

The new inquiry will try to determine if the license is connected to Moore.

Some key pieces of evidence, however, are gone.

A bank surveillance video FBI agents once suspected might show McVeigh participating in a robbery with the Aryan gang was inexplicably destroyed in 1999.



AP PHOTO

Timothy McVeigh is seen in this April 19, 1995 file photo taken just hours after the Oklahoma City bombing. He was being booked on a firearm charge at the Noble County Jail in Perry, Okla.

So, too, were some explosive blasting caps, two Christmas packages and a duffel bag found in the possession of the robbers that match the contents seen in the trunk of McVeigh's car weeks before the bombing.

The FBI never determined what McVeigh did with hundreds of blasting caps he stole before the Oklahoma bombing.

The FBI has pictures of the six caps found in the bank robbers' possession that might help determine if they are linked to McVeigh.

Agents also interviewed witnesses who stated the robbers' caps originated with two gang members who were in Oklahoma just before the bombing, staying at a white supremacist compound that McVeigh called at least once.